

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Va. Dept. of Environmental Quality

STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER ISSUES FISH ADVISORY IN TWO SOUTHWEST RIVERS

(Richmond, Va.)—Virginia's Commissioner of Health E. Anne Peterson, M.D., M.P.H, today issued a fish consumption advisory for carp in certain parts of the New River and Bluestone River due to contamination with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

"The first part of the advisory recommends no consumption of carp in the New River beginning at the Route 114 bridge crossing (Peppers Ferry Blvd.) just north of Radford, Virginia. The advisory continues downstream to the Virginia-West Virginia state line near the town of Glen Lyn in Giles County, Virginia. Carp samples caught in the New River at Glen Lyn had PCB levels at 3,259 parts per billion (ppb). Carp samples caught in the New River at Whitethorne had PCB levels at 686 ppb. The health department's level of concern for PCBs is 600 ppb or higher," Dr. Peterson said.

The second part of the advisory recommends no consumption of carp caught in the Bluestone River beginning at the Route 460 bridge crossing just south of Bluefield, Virginia. The advisory continues downstream to the Virginia-West Virginia state line near the town of Yards in Tazewell County, Virginia. Carp samples caught in the Bluestone River at Falls Mills had PCB levels at 2,369 ppb.

"Fish is an important part of a balanced diet and is a good source of protein. People should continue to eat other kinds of fish caught in these areas. Other species of fish caught in the New River and the Bluestone River did not have high levels of PCBs and are safe to eat," Dr. Peterson said.

The fish consumption advisory was issued after data from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) routine fish tissue sampling was evaluated by the Virginia Department of Health. "DEQ will be collecting additional fish samples from the affected segments of the Bluestone River and the New River to better define the extent of the advisory areas. In addition, DEQ will investigate possible sources of the PCBs, which apparently have entered the rivers over many years," said Khizar Wasti, Ph.D., Director of the state health department's Division of Health Hazards Control.

PCBs are a group of man-made industrial chemicals that exist as a mixture and may contain up to 209 individual compounds. Since 1977, PCBs have not been produced in the U.S., but they are still found in the environment. PCBs were once widely used as coolants and lubricants in transformers, capacitors and other electrical equipment.

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Long-term consumption of fish contaminated with high levels of PCBs may increase the risk of cancer. The Virginia Department of Health recommends the following preparation precautions to reduce any potential harmful effects from PCBs:

- Eat the smaller, younger fish (within the legal limits). They are less likely to contain harmful levels of PCBs than larger, older fish.
- Remove the skin, fat (from the belly and top of the fish) and internal organs where PCBs are most likely to accumulate before cooking the fish.
- Bake, broil or grill on an open rack to allow fats to drain away from the meat.
- Discard the fats that cook out of the fish.
- Avoid or reduce the amount of fish drippings or broth that are used to flavor the meal.
- Eat less deep fried fish, since frying seals PCBs into the fatty tissue.

For more information on the Virginia Department of Health's Fish Advisories, log onto www.vdh.state.va.us/HHControl/fishing_advisories.htm

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